



Alzheimer's Association and Alzheimer's Impact Movement Statement for the Record

United States Senate Special Committee on Aging Hearing on "Optimizing Longevity: From Research to Action"

February 12, 2025

The Alzheimer's Association and Alzheimer's Impact Movement (AIM) appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement for the record for the Senate Special Committee on Aging hearing on "**Optimizing Longevity: From Research to Action.**" We thank the Committee for its continued leadership on issues crucial to individuals living with Alzheimer's and other dementias. This statement underscores the critical role of family caregivers and research on modifiable risk factors in addressing cognitive impairment, including the need for greater risk reduction strategies and awareness to improve individuals' quality of life and longevity.

Founded in 1980, the Alzheimer's Association is the world's leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer's care, support, and research. Our mission is to eliminate Alzheimer's disease and other dementias through the advancement of research, to provide and enhance care and support for all affected, and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health. AIM is the Association's advocacy affiliate, working in a strategic partnership to make Alzheimer's a national priority. Together, the Alzheimer's Association and AIM advocate for policies to fight Alzheimer's disease, including increased investment in research, improved care and support, and the development of approaches to reduce the risk of developing dementia.

The Impact of Family Caregivers

Caregivers of individuals living with Alzheimer's or another dementia play an essential role in maintaining the quality of life for their loved ones and helping them live independently in their homes and communities for as long as possible. They are the backbone of our nation's health care system, providing essential care to loved ones at great personal, physical, and financial sacrifice. In 2023 alone, over 11 million dedicated caregivers provided a remarkable 18.4 billion hours of unpaid care for individuals living with Alzheimer's or another dementia, valued at nearly \$350 billion. One in three dementia caregivers has been providing care for five or more years. In fact, of the total lifetime cost of caring for someone with dementia, 70 percent is borne by families — either through out-of-pocket health and long term care expenses or from the value of unpaid care. As a result of this financial strain, many families significantly cut back on savings contributions and other spending, with some reporting eating less due to care costs.

It is evident that Alzheimer's takes a devastating toll on caregivers. Amid these challenges, there is an urgent need to alleviate the overwhelming costs faced by caregivers. We strongly support the bipartisan Credit for Caring Act, which would create a new, nonrefundable federal tax credit of up to \$5,000 for eligible working family caregivers of individuals, regardless of age, with certain functional or cognitive limitations. The tax credit would help alleviate some of the financial strain on these selfless caregivers nationwide and could be used to offset some of the costs of

caregiving, including the costs of respite care, transportation, lost wages, and more. Providing these dedicated caregivers with financial relief would not only improve their own quality of life but would also allow for greater access to caregiver education and resources essential to ensuring adequate care and long-term quality of life for their loved ones. In addition, prioritizing home-based care through a family caregiver tax credit can reduce reliance on costly long term care facilities, saving taxpayer dollars while improving the health and well-being of individuals living with Alzheimer's and other dementias. We look forward to working with Congress and members of the Committee to advance the bipartisan Credit for Caring Act and other legislation to support caregivers, as they enhance longevity and quality of life for our aging population.

The Science Behind Dementia Risk Reduction and Brain Health

As of 2024, nearly 7 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's, a number expected to rise to nearly 13 million by 2050. With many more at risk of developing the disease or another form of dementia, the need for effective dementia risk reduction strategies that help all communities increases by the day. Two-thirds of Americans have at least one major potential risk factor for dementia. As the prevalence of dementia continues to rise, addressing modifiable risk factors is essential not only to reduce the number of new cases but also to prevent current projections from worsening.

Population-based and epidemiologic studies show that certain modifiable risk factors can increase the risk of cognitive decline and possibly dementia. A growing body of evidence shows that healthy behaviors can protect and promote brain health. Given the growing evidence that lifestyle factors play a significant role in cognitive health, larger studies are essential to further understand how we can effectively reduce the risk of cognitive decline and help individuals live longer, happier lives. The Alzheimer's Association [U.S. Study to Protect Brain Health Through Lifestyle Intervention to Reduce Risk](#) (U.S. POINTER) is a two-year clinical trial to evaluate whether lifestyle interventions that simultaneously target many risk factors protect cognitive function in older adults who have an increased risk for cognitive decline. U.S. POINTER is the first such study to be conducted on a large group of Americans across the United States. Approximately 2,000 volunteer older adults who are at increased risk for dementia have been enrolled and will be followed for two years. Two lifestyle interventions will be compared, which vary in intensity and format. Eligible volunteers are randomly assigned to these interventions to evaluate whether cognitive benefits from a structured program differ from a self-guided program. Lifestyle interventions combining multiple behavior components show promise as a therapeutic strategy to protect brain health. We look forward to sharing the results of this groundbreaking study soon.

Alzheimer's Association Public Health Center of Excellence on Dementia Risk Reduction

The prevention of aging-related cognitive impairment and dementia is a major and urgent public health priority as well as a priority for individuals, families, and communities. Because evidence for the effectiveness of specific health-related behaviors and practices has begun to emerge, in 2018, Congress passed the Building Our Largest Dementia (BOLD) Infrastructure for Alzheimer's Act (P.L. 115-406) to empower public health departments to develop and implement effective dementia interventions in their communities. We are deeply grateful for the bipartisan, bicameral support that led to the reauthorization of this vital law in December 2024, through the

passage of the BOLD Reauthorization Act (P.L. 118-142), allowing this great work to continue for an additional five years.

Sustained funding for the BOLD Act's implementation over the years has allowed the CDC to award funding to three Public Health Centers of Excellence (PHCOE) and make 66 awards to 45 state, local, and tribal public health departments. The PHCOEs are working to increase the education of public health officials, health care professionals, and the public on public health strategies that promote brain health, and support people living with dementia and their caregivers. These investments are critical to advancing public health strategies that not only promote brain health but also support longer, healthier lives. The PHCOEs are working to increase the education of public health officials, health care professionals, and the public on public health strategies that promote brain health and longevity, while also supporting people living with dementia and their caregivers. We look forward to continuing working with Congress throughout the appropriations process to ensure this vital work may continue.

With support from the CDC, the Alzheimer's Association is proud to lead the PHCOE on Dementia Risk Reduction, which works to help state, local, and tribal public health agencies address risk factors for cognitive decline and dementia. Launched in 2020, the Center serves as a national resource in translating the latest science on dementia risk reduction into tools, materials, and messaging that public health agencies can use to reduce dementia risk for all people. More specifically, the Center offers one-on-one engagement with public health officials to encourage action in their communities; provides technical assistance to help public health officials design, implement, and evaluate risk reduction activities; and publishes online resources on dementia risk factors and what public health can do to address them. By identifying and mitigating key dementia risk factors, these efforts directly contribute to the goal of increasing a healthy lifespan.

The Alzheimer's Association PHCOE on Risk Reduction has also partnered with Wake Forest School of Medicine to convene a panel of nationally and internationally renowned scientists with expertise in specific areas of dementia and cognitive impairment prevention research. The panel's charge was to review, evaluate, and synthesize the current knowledge on preventing or delaying the onset of cognitive decline and dementia. In the report ["Reducing Dementia Risk: A Summary of the Science and Public Health Impact."](#) the panel ultimately identified eight modifiable risk factors based on the level of research support and strength of evidence, to inform emerging efforts by public health agencies throughout the United States to address the risk for cognitive decline and dementia: diabetes and obesity, physical activity, social engagement, diet and nutrition, vascular health, sleep, smoking and alcohol, and sensory impairments. Addressing these risk factors not only reduces the risk of dementia but also enhances overall longevity, enhancing the aging population's independence and vitality.

While new treatments may slow the progression of cognitive decline, steps can be taken now to reduce the risk of developing it and, in turn, optimize individuals' quality of life. As illustrated above, the science on dementia risk reduction is quickly evolving, and the evidence linking certain behaviors and conditions and long-term cognitive health and dementia is growing stronger.

Conclusion

By prioritizing policies that support caregivers and investing in risk reduction strategies, we can help the aging population live longer, healthier lives. The Alzheimer's Association and AIM deeply appreciate the Committee's continued commitment to advancing issues vital to the millions of families affected by Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. We look forward to working with the Committee in a bipartisan way to enhance longevity and improve quality of life for those impacted by dementia.